



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, June 6, - June 12, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Field work has been ongoing to investigate wolf reports, trap, and determine whether packs have denned. Here's the latest.

Bradley pulled traps on June 11th for the Trail Creek pack in the East Fork of the Bitterroot. No wolves were caught despite a 13 day effort. Two wolves were caught but unfortunately pulled out of the traps. Efforts will resume at a later date. During this time surveys were also conducted for the East Fork Bitterroot and Sula packs but very little sign was found. Status of the East Fork pack is uncertain due to the mortality of the presumed alpha male earlier this spring and disappearance of the collared alpha female. The Sula pack is believed to still be present but may be denning in a remote area.

On 6/2-3, Bradley scouted the Philipsburg area for the uncollared East Fork Rock Creek and Ram Mtn pack. No sign was found.

Lindsey Rich (UM researcher) is helping with field efforts in western Montana this summer. She helped Bradley run traps in the East Fork of the Bitterroot and conduct surveys in the area. On 6/10, she confirmed presence of at least 2 pups in the Welcome Creek pack east of Florence.

Thanks to FS biologist Dave Romero and two of his seasonals (Andrea and Sean) out of the West Fork Ranger District who have been assisting FWP in the last week by helping Bradley check traps in the East Fork of the Bitterroot and scouting for wolf sign up the West Fork. They confirmed reproduction in the Painted Rocks pack and will be helping FWP set up a trapline in that area in coming weeks.

FWP biologist Vickie Edwards followed up on a report of wolf pups west of Tarkio in the lower Clark Fork. Tracking conditions were poor but she was able to find a number of wolf scats confirming wolf presence in the area. FWP will attempt to try to trap/collar in this area in the near future. Further monitoring will help determine whether this pack is separate from the Bitterroot Range pack which is known to use the North Fork of the Fish Creek drainage.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Idaho Fish and Game is attempting to dart and put GPS collars out on the Fish Creek pack this week. The pack spends time in both Idaho and the main stem of Fish Creek in Montana.

Flights: None.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

Catching Up:

On 6/3, WS, WS confirmed that wolves killed two calves on private land west of Wisdom. WS has been attempting to lethally remove the remaining Battlefield pack members (3-4 wolves) in this area. Control work is ongoing from the previous depredations dating back to April 30 in this same area. WS currently has traps set in the area.

On 6/3, Wildlife Services confirmed that a wolf or wolves killed 1 buck south of Grant on private land. On 6/6, WS confirmed that 1 buck was killed by wolves and determined one buck as a probable wolf kill. On 6/7, WS confirmed that 2 ewes and 1 lamb were killed and 2 ewes were injured by a wolf or wolves. All the incidents occurred about 6 miles apart. No radio collars were heard in the area and the pack or individual involved in the depredations is unknown. WS has been authorized to lethally remove one wolf and collar one wolf in an effort to identify more information about current wolf activity in the area. The producer has moved the bucks from the area to a different pasture and WS has set traps.

On 6/5, a landowner in the Sula area reported to FWP that his 150 lb Great Dane had been killed by wolves over Memorial Day weekend. Due to the timing of the report the incident was not investigated.

On 6/8, Idaho WS confirmed a sheep was killed on the U. S. Sheep Station near Humphrey, ID. The pack thought responsible is called Sage Creek and it is a border pack. ID WS heard the Sage Creek radio within about ½ mile of the depredation site. ID Fish and Game authorized ID WS to remove 1 wolf. The pack has since moved back into Montana and MT FWP has given ID WS or MT WS staff authorization to work on either side of the state line.

On 6/9, FWP and WS received and returned several calls from Garfield County regarding the possibility that wolves or wolf hybrids were in the area as some cattle were showing abnormal behavior. FWP / WS also communicated with the Garfield County Sheriff's Office, local livestock owners, and Congressmen's Rehburg's Office. No one reported seeing actual wolves or wolf-like canids, nor was any sign reported or found. FWP confirmed that no wolves were released and that we had not heard of any loose wolf hybrids. Area producers are aware of what they can do to protect

livestock and the procedures to follow to request an investigation of injured or dead livestock. No further reports of abnormal behavior, wolves, or wolf-like hybrids have been received.

On 6/10, WS confirmed a ewe had been injured by a wolf on private land east of Drummond. The ewe had to be put down because of its injuries. It is unknown whether a lone wolf was involved or if this may be a new establishing pair with pups in the area. As such, FWP has asked Wildlife Services to try to trap and collar. The sheep are being moved to a different area and the owner of the sheep is also going to try some blinking lights and scarecrows to try to prevent further problems, in addition to the already present guard dogs equipped with spiked collars. The dogs may have deterred the wolf from killing the ewe outright. The sheep are being grazed in the area as part of a weed management program.

On 6/10, WS investigated a dead calf near Jackson (Big Hole Valley). It was unconfirmed and had died from an apparent infection. Wolf tracks were found in the area and FWP/WS plan to initiate trapping to place a collar in the group at some point this field season.

Outreach and Education Activities

On 6/11, Sime attended the Montana Stockgrowers Meeting in Miles City. She gave an update on the state program and delisting. FWP Commission Chair Shane Colton also spoke. About 45 people attended.

On 6/11 in the evening, Sime participated on a panel discussion after a showing of the film “Lords of Nature” about trophic cascades. Other panelists were from the Montana Wildlife Federation, Yellowstone National Park Wolf Program, a Montana rancher from the Red Lodge area, and the Western Wolf Coalition. About 35 people attended.

On 6/12, Sime gave a talk to close out the Forest Carnivores training for state and federal agency personnel organized and sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service Regional Office. About 25 people attended.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

Nothing to report.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Litigation Formally Starts

On June 2, a coalition of 13 groups, represented by the law firm EarthJustice, challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9th Circuit). The complaint alleges the USFWS delisting decision was an arbitrary and capricious violation of the federal Endangered Species Act for a variety of reasons. A request for a preliminary injunction (which if granted by the Court, would keep federal ESA protections in place during the litigation) has not been filed at this time. The Greater Yellowstone has also filed a lawsuit challenging the federal delisting decision. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will seek to intervene in the Missoula Court on behalf of the State of Montana. Montana supports federal efforts to delist wolves.

Additionally, the State of Wyoming filed a lawsuit in the 10th Circuit (Cheyenne Wyoming) challenging USFWS’s rejection of Wyoming’s regulatory framework and state plan.

Background for Montana

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a "species in need of management" statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season: FWP and the FWP Commission continue efforts to develop and prepare for a potential 2009 season. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place for a potential fall 2009 season. But FWP and the FWP Commission must still establish a quota (the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters) for 2009. The public is being asked to comment on a range of statewide range quotas of 26, 75, and 165 that would be partitioned out to a total of three Wolf Management Units. Comment is also being sought on creation of a North Fork Flathead subunit subquota of 2 wolves that would apply to the total quota established in Wolf Management Unit 1.

Public comment will be accepted through 5pm June 19. FWP expects to make a final quota recommendation for FWP Commission consideration and final action on July 9. To comment electronically, follow this link: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/default.html> and look for the "Proposed 2009 Wolf Quotas and Subquota" bullet and click on the link.

Written comment will also be accepted via postal mail and must be received by 5pm June 19: Drop comments off in person or mail to: FWP, Wildlife Division, Wolf Quota Comments, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620. Written letters can be submitted in their original format electronically at the link above.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

Nothing to report. The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.